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Situation of human rights in Myanmar

Report of the Secretary-General*

Summary

The present report is submitted pursuant to paragraph 5 of General Assembly resolution 61/232. During the reporting period, two visits to Myanmar were undertaken in the context of the Secretary-General's good offices mandate. Following his first visit in May 2006, the Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs undertook a second visit from 9 to 12 November 2006 at the invitation of the Government. On 22 May 2007, the Secretary-General designated his Special Adviser on the International Compact with Iraq and Other Political Issues and former Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, Ibrahim Gambari, to continue to pursue the good offices on his behalf. From June to August 2007, the Special Adviser engaged in extensive consultations with key interested countries, with a view to returning to Myanmar as soon as possible. In response to the demonstrations and crisis that broke out in the country on 19 August, which attracted unprecedented world attention and generated serious concerns within the international community, the Secretary-General on 26 September dispatched his Special Adviser to Myanmar, with the support of Myanmar's neighbours, the States members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the Security Council. The Special Adviser visited Myanmar from 29 September to 2 October. Each visit to Myanmar included meetings with both the Chairman of the State Peace and Development Council, Senior General Than Shwe, and Daw Aung San Suu Kyi.

* The present report is being submitted on 22 October 2007 so as to include as much up-to-date information as possible.

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In the course of these visits, five key areas of concern to the United Nations and the international community were identified on which the Government of Myanmar is expected to deliver concrete results: (a) the release of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, or at least an improvement in her detention conditions, and a security review leading to the release of all political prisoners; (b) the need for a genuinely inclusive, participatory and transparent political process through which all the people of Myanmar can contribute to shaping their country's future; (c) the need for better cooperation with the United Nations and other humanitarian agencies with a view to ensuring free and unhindered humanitarian access, including the possibility of a technical assessment mission to border areas; (d) a cessation of hostilities in conflict areas, including Kayin State; and (e) the need for continued cooperation with the International Labour Organization on the establishment of a joint mechanism to evaluate forced labour complaints.

Furthermore, the following guiding principles for the implementation of the good offices were welcomed by all key interested Member States: (a) the good offices is not an event but a process that will require sustained engagement through regular visits and consultations with all concerned; (b) Myanmar presents a complex situation that cannot be reduced to a single issue — however important that may be — but rather requires engagement on a broad range of political, human rights, humanitarian and socio-economic topics; (c) engagement cannot be an end in itself, but rather must yield concrete results; and (d) the international community needs to work together in order to encourage Myanmar to move in the right direction. Key interested countries also expressed concern to varying degrees about the situation in Myanmar, support for the Secretary-General's good offices and appreciation for the Special Adviser's efforts based on the above principles.

Against a few modest but encouraging steps taken by the Government over the past year, the tragic events of recent weeks constituted a serious setback for Myanmar. The main objectives of the Special Adviser's visit to Myanmar during the recent crisis were threefold: (a) to assess the situation on the ground in the wake of recent demonstrations; (b) to deliver clear messages from the Secretary-General to the Myanmar authorities at the highest level in response to the situation; and (c) to try to promote dialogue between the Government and the opposition as the best path to ending the crisis and achieving national reconciliation. While the Secretary-General took note of the initial steps taken by the Government to de-escalate the crisis following the Special Adviser's visit, he remains concerned about continuing reports of human rights violations, particularly the excessive use of force and arbitrary detentions, and calls upon the authorities to put an immediate end to any abuses. The Secretary-General welcomes the announcement by the Government of a possible meeting between Senior General Than Shwe and Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and the subsequent announcement of the appointment of a liaison officer to establish a channel of communication with her, as suggested by the Special Adviser. The Secretary-General urges both parties to display maximum flexibility in order to meet as soon as possible and stands ready to continue to use his good offices to help facilitate any efforts at dialogue. The Secretary-General further encourages the Government of Myanmar to seriously consider the recommendations made by his Special Adviser to address the underlying political and economic factors to the recent unrest, including the need to release all political prisoners, and the possibility of establishing a broad-based constitutional review commission and a broad-based poverty alleviation commission.

While the Secretary-General recognizes that the responsibility for the future of Myanmar rests ultimately with the Government and people of Myanmar, he believes that a return to the status quo that existed prior to the crisis would be unacceptable and unsustainable. The Secretary-General is thus committed to making every effort, including through the intensification of his good offices, so that the United Nations can continue to work in partnership with Myanmar and support its efforts towards national reconciliation, the transition to democracy and full respect for human rights as the necessary foundations for long-term stability and prosperity. This will require the sustained engagement of the United Nations, with the active support of the international community, including especially the countries in the region. In this connection, the Secretary-General welcomes the constructive role played by Myanmar's neighbours and the members of ASEAN, and encourages such efforts to continue. The Secretary-General also welcomes the Presidential statement adopted by the Security Council on 11 October 2007 (S/PRST/2007/37) in support of his good offices mandate, as well as Human Rights Council resolution S-5/1 on the situation of human rights in Myanmar. The more united the international community is, the better the prospects for arriving at the shared goals of peace, democracy and prosperity for the people of Myanmar.

I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to paragraph 5 of General Assembly resolution 61/232, in which the Assembly requested the Secretary-General, inter alia, to continue to provide his good offices and to pursue his discussions on the situation of human rights and the restoration of democracy with the Government and the people of Myanmar, including all relevant parties to the national reconciliation process in Myanmar, to offer technical assistance to the Government in this regard, and to report to the Assembly at its sixty-second session on the progress made in the implementation of the resolution. The report focuses on the good offices dimension of the resolution covering the period since the previous report of the Secretary-General to the General Assembly, of 9 October 2006 (A/61/504). A separate report by the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar has been circulated under the symbol A/62/223.

2. Since the previous report of the Secretary-General, further efforts have been made to engage the Myanmar authorities through the good offices mandate entrusted to the Secretary-General by the General Assembly. These efforts were intensified in response to the crisis that broke out in Myanmar on 19 August 2007.

3. In the follow-up to his first visit to Myanmar, from 18 to 20 May 2006, the Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs was invited by the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Nyan Win, to visit Myanmar again from 9 to 12 November 2006. The main objectives of the Under-Secretary-General's second mission were: (a) to meet with the same key interlocutors as during his first visit in order to deepen and broaden the process of dialogue and engagement between Myanmar and the United Nations; (b) to directly convey the clear message at all levels of the need for concrete results in key areas of concern to the United Nations and the international community; and (c) to continue to exercise the Secretary-General's good offices as an avenue for building further confidence between Myanmar and the United Nations and encouraging Myanmar to demonstrate progress towards national reconciliation, the restoration of democracy and full respect for human rights.

4. As was the case during his first visit, the Under-Secretary-General met again with the Chairman of the State Peace and Development Council, Senior General Than Shwe, the Vice-Chairman of the State Peace and Development Council, Vice-Senior General Maung Aye, and Secretary-1 of the State Peace and Development Council Lieutenant-General Thein Sein, as well as the Minister for Foreign Affairs and the Ministers of Labour and Planning. He was also able to meet again with Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and, separately on United Nations premises, with members of the Executive Committee of her party, the National League for Democracy (NLD). On the sidelines of the Government-sponsored National Convention, he also met with delegates from 17 ceasefire ethnic groups, political parties and members of parliament. The Under-Secretary-General also received through the United Nations country team in Yangon messages from other relevant interlocutors, including a petition from representatives of the "88 Generation Students". On 27 November 2006, the Under-Secretary-General briefed the Security Council, at its request, on the outcome of his second mission.

5. On 12 January 2007, the Security Council considered a draft resolution (S/2007/14) on the situation in Myanmar, which was not adopted due to the negative vote of two permanent members of the Council.

6. On 22 May 2007, the Secretary-General designated his Special Adviser on the International Compact with Iraq and Other Political Issues and former Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, Ibrahim Gambari, to continue to pursue the good offices mandate on his behalf with the Government of Myanmar and all relevant parties to the national reconciliation process. Immediately following his designation, from June to August 2007, the Special Adviser engaged in a series of extensive consultations with key interested Member States — including China, France, India, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, the Russian Federation, Singapore, Thailand, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the United States of America, as well as the European Union — in order to ascertain their respective positions and promote support for the Secretary-General's good offices mission, with a view to returning to Myanmar as soon as possible. The Special Adviser also consulted with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the International Labour Organization (ILO), and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). The Minister for Foreign Affairs of Myanmar subsequently invited the Special Adviser to return to Myanmar in the second week of November 2007.

7. Meanwhile, the Assistant Secretary-General and Deputy Emergency Relief Coordinator for Humanitarian Affairs, Margareta Wahlström, visited Myanmar from 3 to 6 April at the invitation of the Government for the purpose of discussing the humanitarian situation with Government counterparts and humanitarian partners; articulating the relationship of the Office of the Coordinator for Humanitarian Affairs with the newly appointed United Nations Humanitarian Coordinator in Yangon; and examining key issues related to access to vulnerable populations. The Secretary-General's Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict, Radhika Coomaraswamy, also visited Myanmar from 25 to 29 June at the invitation of the Government to review the implementation of the Secretary-General's mandate pursuant to Security Council resolution 1612 (2005). The authorities have continued to deny the requests for a visit by the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar, Paulo Sérgio Pinheiro, to the country.

II. Content and outcome of discussions

8. In the course of his second mission, in November 2006, the Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs emphasized in all his discussions that while his first visit six months earlier had re-established dialogue between Myanmar and the United Nations after almost three years without high-level contacts, too little progress had been made since then on issues which had been discussed with the senior leadership and Government. He made it clear that expectations were high for Myanmar to demonstrate concrete progress in five key areas of concern to the United Nations and the international community: (a) the release of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, or at least an improvement in her detention conditions, and a security review leading to the release of all political prisoners; (b) the need for a genuinely inclusive, participatory and transparent political process through which all the people of Myanmar can contribute to shaping their country's future; (c) the need for better cooperation with the United Nations and other humanitarian agencies with a view to ensuring free and unhindered humanitarian access, including the possibility of a technical assessment mission to border areas; (d) a cessation of hostilities in conflict areas, including Kayin State; and (e) the need for continued cooperation

with the International Labour Organization (ILO) on the establishment of a joint mechanism to evaluate forced labour complaints. Specific recommendations relating to humanitarian action, which were followed up on by the Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs during her visit in April 2007, included the opening of dialogue with the Government on the operational environment inside the country for humanitarian actors, an interministerial meeting with the United Nations country team, the appointment of a liaison officer at the political level to address humanitarian issues, and a United Nations inter-agency humanitarian assessment mission to Kayin State.

9. Although the Government did not reject any of the above recommendations, it consistently emphasized the complexity of Myanmar's political and economic challenges and the Government's efforts to address such challenges, including through its seven-step political roadmap to democracy, starting with the completion of the National Convention. At the same time, the Government repeatedly reaffirmed that cooperation with the United Nations is a cornerstone of Myanmar's foreign policy. In terms of results, Myanmar's response has been mixed.

10. Among the positive developments, the Secretary-General welcomed the agreement reached between the Government of Myanmar and ILO on 26 February 2007 on the establishment of a mechanism to address forced labour complaints as a good example of what can be achieved through mutual cooperation. The agreement is being implemented to the mutual satisfaction of ILO and the Government, and the ILO liaison capacity in Yangon has also been strengthened. Another example of cooperation between Myanmar and the international community is the implementation of the Three Diseases Fund to combat malaria, tuberculosis and HIV/AIDS in Myanmar. The Fund, which is supported by six donors so far (Australia, the European Commission, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden and the United Kingdom) with pooled funds of US$ 100 million over five years, is managed by the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS). Drug reduction is another area where Myanmar has steadily been making significant progress over the past few years, although the 2007 increase in poppy cultivation calls for continued vigilance and sustained cooperation between the Government and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). On the whole, the Government has demonstrated greater openness to United Nations actors across a range of activities that are essential for the well-being of the people of Myanmar. Both the Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and the Secretary-General's Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict were encouraged by their findings during their visits and are planning follow-up visits with a view to working with the Government to implement specific recommendations pertaining to their respective mandates.

11. On the political front, the resumption of the National Convention for its final session on 18 July 2007 raised expectations that the Government would seize the opportunity to engage in an inclusive, participatory and transparent dialogue with all relevant parties to the national reconciliation process on the country's future constitutional framework, as encouraged by the Secretary-General. While noting the completion of the Convention on 3 September 2007 as the first step in the Government's seven-step political roadmap, serious concerns remain about the exclusive nature of the process to date and about provisions reportedly adopted at the Convention that would seemingly run counter to the objectives of national reconciliation and democratization.

12. During his consultations with key interested Member States from June to August 2007, the Special Adviser underscored four principles guiding the good offices efforts: (a) good offices is not an event but a process that will require sustained engagement through regular visits and consultations with all concerned; (b) Myanmar presents a complex situation that cannot be reduced to a single issue — however important that may be — but rather requires engagement on a broad range of political, human rights, humanitarian and socio-economic topics; (c) engagement cannot be an end in itself, but rather must yield concrete results; and (d) the international community needs to work together in order to encourage Myanmar to move in the right direction. In response, key interested Member States conveyed two basic messages to the Special Adviser: concern to varying degrees about the situation in Myanmar; and support for the Secretary-General's good offices and appreciation for the Special Adviser's efforts based on the above principles. Beyond expressions of support, the Special Adviser also found a readiness to proactively consider ways of working with one another and with Myanmar to find solutions for moving forward.

III. Recent developments

13. The sudden announcement by the Government on 19 August 2007 of a sharp increase in fuel prices was followed by peaceful demonstrations against the Government's economic policies and overall political and socio-economic conditions in the country. The demonstrations, which also coincided with the completion of the National Convention on 3 September, spread from Yangon to other cities and quickly grew in size when monks started marching in protest against the Government's initial response to the demonstrators, which included the arrest of several 88 Generation Students leaders, activists and members of the opposition. According to some reports, between 50,000 and 100,000 people were peacefully demonstrating in the streets of Yangon, Mandalay and other cities, including several thousand monks and nuns. As demonstrations continued to grow, the authorities moved to suppress the peaceful protests, including by deploying security units throughout Yangon and other cities and by declaring a ban on public assembly as well as a curfew. Although the authorities initially showed restraint in their handling of the situation, by 24 September media reports indicated increasing numbers of casualties among demonstrators. While the authorities appear to have used non-lethal force in some instances to disband the peaceful protestors, the reported number of casualties among demonstrators raise concern about the excessive use of force and ill treatment by the security forces.

14. In response to the crisis, the Secretary-General issued statements expressing his concern at the escalation of tensions on the ground, making clear that the Government's response to the demonstrations ran counter to the spirit of Myanmar's cooperation with his good offices, and calling for maximum restraint and dialogue. The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar also joined in calling for the release of all those arrested during the demonstrations, including monks, 88 Generation Students leaders and members of the opposition and calling for an end to the use of force against peaceful demonstrators.

15. On 26 September 2007, the Secretary-General dispatched his Special Adviser to the region in anticipation of an invitation from the Government of Myanmar for him to visit the country. The Special Adviser visited Myanmar from 29 September to

2 October. Within the context of the Secretary-General's good offices mandate, the objectives of the Special Adviser's mission were three-fold: (a) to assess the situation on the ground in the wake of recent demonstrations; (b) to deliver clear messages from the Secretary-General to the Myanmar authorities at the highest level in response to the situation; and (c) to try to promote dialogue between the Government and the opposition as the best path to ending the crisis and achieving national reconciliation.

16. As was the case during each of his previous visits to Myanmar in his capacity as Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, the Special Adviser was able to meet with Senior General Than Shwe and twice with Daw Aung San Suu Kyi. He also met with Vice-Senior General Maung Aye, General Thura Shwe Mann and Acting Prime Minister Lieutenant-General Thein Sein, as well as the Ministers of Information and Culture and the Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs. Although he was not able to meet with other relevant interlocutors — despite repeated requests — he did receive messages from many groups and individuals, including from representatives of monks and the 88 Generation Students. He also consulted with the United Nations country team and the ICRC delegation in Yangon. The Special Adviser and his delegation were also taken to a mass rally in Lashio (northeastern Shan State) organized in support of the Government's National Convention and the seven-step political roadmap. On 5 October, the Special Adviser briefed both the President of the General Assembly and the Security Council, at its request, on the outcome of his mission. The Secretary-General also addressed the Security Council on that occasion.

17. By the time the Special Adviser's mission started, the protests on the streets of Yangon had been largely put down. By the Government's own account, up to a dozen people were killed (including a Japanese journalist), several dozen wounded and over two thousand arrested. Unconfirmed reports, however, put the number of casualties higher. Of great concern to the United Nations and the international community are continuing reports of abuses being committed by security and non-uniformed elements, particularly at night during curfew, including raids on private homes, beatings, arbitrary arrests and disappearances. There have also been reports of mass relocation outside Yangon of monks arrested in the course of the demonstrations and of monasteries that remain blockaded. The United Nations Resident Coordinator in Yangon reported that three national United Nations staff and one dependant were arrested and detained. This was brought to the attention of the authorities at the highest level, and the individuals concerned were subsequently released. The United Nations office in Yangon has also received requests from people asking for a safe place to hide.

18. On 2 October 2007, the Human Rights Council held a special session to consider the unfolding human rights situation in Myanmar. At that session, the Council unanimously adopted resolution S-5/1, in which, inter alia, it deplored the violent repression of peaceful demonstrations and urged the Government of Myanmar to release detainees and other longer-term political prisoners, lift restrictions on fundamental freedoms and engage in dialogue with all parties to achieve genuine national reconciliation, democratization and the establishment of the rule of law. The Council encouraged the Government of Myanmar and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights to engage in a dialogue with a view to ensuring full respect for human rights, and requested the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar to assess the current

situation and to monitor implementation of the resolution, including by seeking an urgent visit to Myanmar. The Secretary-General urges the Government of Myanmar to extend its full cooperation to the Special Rapporteur and to invite him to visit the country at the first opportunity.

19. Amid ongoing demonstrations and acts of repression by the authorities, the Special Adviser was able to deliver clear and strong messages on behalf of the Secretary-General directly to the authorities at the highest level. He emphasized the changing domestic, regional and international context within which his mission was taking place with the clear and strong support of Myanmar's neighbours, ASEAN countries and the Security Council. Secondly, the Special Adviser expressed in the strongest possible terms the Secretary-General's and the international community's deep concern about the events and made specific recommendations for immediate steps to de-escalate tensions. These include putting an end to night raids and arrests during curfew; lifting the curfew as soon as possible; releasing all those arrested during the demonstrations; allowing access to clinics for those wounded during demonstrations; withdrawing military forces from the street; ensuring respect for human rights and the rule of law in the exercise of law enforcement, in accordance with international standards; allowing ICRC to have access to persons detained and to assist in tracing missing people; and putting an immediate end to raids on monasteries.

20. In his discussions with the Government, the Special Adviser was told that the increase in fuel prices could not in itself have triggered the demonstrations unless they were instigated by a small minority of elements opposed to the Government and supported by external forces. The Special Adviser was also told by the Government that the demonstrations were limited to Yangon and Mandalay, while the rest of the country had remained calm; that the authorities had shown the utmost restraint in handling the situation; and that most of those arrested could be expected to be released shortly after investigation and interrogation. By the end of the Special Adviser's mission, the Myanmar authorities announced a relaxation of the curfew in Yangon and Mandalay, and reports indicate that visible military presence in the streets has been reduced. The Government also reported that, as of 5 October, a total of 2,095 persons arrested in the course of demonstrations had been released, including 728 monks, and that more releases would follow, as a direct result of the Special Adviser's request to the authorities on behalf of the Secretary-General. The situation in the wake of the demonstrations remains of serious concern, however, in the light of continuing reports of human rights violations being committed by security and non-uniformed personnel, particularly at night, including raids on private homes, intimidation, beatings, arbitrary arrests and disappearances.

21. With regard to the promotion of dialogue, the Special Adviser emphasized the need for the Government to address without delay the political and socio-economic factors underlying the demonstrations through specific mid- and long-term measures, predicated on all-inclusive dialogue among all stakeholders and with reference to the five key areas of concern to the United Nations and the international community identified during his visit in November 2006. His specific recommendations in this regard included an all-inclusive national reconciliation process; the release of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and all other political prisoners; a signal of the Government's willingness to engage in dialogue with Daw Aung San Suu Kyi; the appointment of a liaison officer to establish a channel of

communication with her; the establishment of a broad-based constitutional review mechanism; and the establishment of a broad-based poverty alleviation commission.

22. The visit allowed the Special Adviser to resume the role he had started to play during his previous visit in his capacity as Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, by conveying messages between the senior leadership and Daw Aung San Suu Kyi. The Special Adviser was allowed to meet with her a second time after meeting with Senior General Than Shwe, and was able to have messages reported back from her to the senior leadership. On 4 October 2007, the Government announced that Senior General Than Shwe was prepared to meet with Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, although with certain conditions. On 8 October, the Government announced the appointment of the Deputy Minister of Labour, Aung Kyi, as a liaison officer with Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, as suggested by the Special Adviser during his visit on behalf of the Secretary-General.

IV. Observations

23. Against the few modest but encouraging steps taken by the Government over the past year, the tragic events of recent weeks clearly constituted a serious setback for Myanmar. In his statement to the Security Council on 5 October 2007, the Secretary-General reiterated that the use of force against peaceful demonstrators was abhorrent and unacceptable. He remained deeply concerned about reports of continued human rights violations, particularly the excessive use of force and arbitrary detentions in the wake of the demonstrations, and the unknown predicament of the large number of individuals who were arrested without due process. The Secretary-General called upon the Government of Myanmar to heed the concerns and requests of the international community, as expressed by the Security Council, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and the Human Rights Council, such as the call to ensure immediate access to ICRC and other humanitarian personnel to all detainees, to conduct an independent and thorough investigation into the killings and enforced disappearances and to effectively engage in a constructive dialogue with the Human Rights Council and its special procedures, especially the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights of Myanmar. In this connection, it is a continuing source of regret that the Special Rapporteur has been denied access to the country for almost four years. The Secretary-General hopes that the Special Rapporteur will be able to fulfil his mandate and visit the country in the near future as part of Myanmar's cooperation with the United Nations.

24. Most regrettably, the Government's repressive response to the demonstrations comes at a time when Myanmar is striving to move forward towards national reconciliation and the restoration of democracy. In this regard, the marches by monks across the country over recent weeks appear to have provided a catalyst for the demonstrations to become explicitly political in nature. This should be understood in the context of the Government's systematic denial of the people's democratic aspirations since 1988, in the name of stability and security. Although the Government succeeded after 14 years in completing the Convention and insists that its roadmap enjoys broad support, the exclusion of key stakeholders and the failure to meet the expectations of key participants tend to undermine the credibility and legitimacy of the process. Of particular concern are reports that the Convention was concluded without accommodating some of the basic demands raised by ethnic

ceasefire groups, which would defeat the Government's efforts over the past 15 years to work with them through the National Convention process.

25. Unless the Government decides to open up and broaden the process that is to define Myanmar's future, the demands for greater inclusiveness, participation and transparency in order to accelerate the transition to democracy and civilian rule are likely to continue. In this context, the Secretary-General believes strongly that there should be opportunities in the period ahead to improve the outcome of the National Convention in ways that are more inclusive, participatory and transparent. A necessary first step for genuine national dialogue is the release of all political detainees. The future of Myanmar belongs to all the people of Myanmar, and it is therefore in the interest of the nation that all those who have a contribution to make should have the opportunity to do so. The specific recommendation to consider the establishment of a broad-based constitutional review mechanism is aimed at encouraging the Government to engage in a post-National Convention process of consultations that would enhance the credibility and legitimacy of the draft constitution to be submitted to referendum. The United Nations has experience in facilitating such a constitutional review process.

26. Now more than ever before, the Secretary-General believes that the Government of Myanmar should seize the opportunity to take bold actions towards democratization and respect for human rights. In addition to accelerating and broadening the national reconciliation process, a serious and comprehensive political dialogue between the Government and the political opposition is indispensable. One important outcome of the Special Adviser's mission in this regard is the announcement by the Government of a possible meeting between Senior General Than Shwe and Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and the subsequent announcement of the appointment of a liaison officer to establish a channel of communication with her. The Secretary-General welcomes this potentially positive development and urges both parties to display maximum flexibility in order to meet as soon as possible and engage in meaningful dialogue. The Secretary-General stands ready to continue to use his good offices to help facilitate any efforts at dialogue.

27. In addition to the imperatives of the political dispensation, the Secretary-General urges the Government to be more responsive to the extremely fragile humanitarian and socio-economic context within which the recent demonstrations and crisis broke out. Whatever the rationale for the Government's decision to suddenly increase fuel prices, the demonstrations that this decision apparently triggered reflect both the extreme economic vulnerability of the Myanmar people and the Government's apparent lack of consultations with the majority of the population that is affected by the reality of living conditions in Myanmar. It is clear that the demonstrations are the expression of deep and widespread discontent about prevailing socio-economic conditions in the country. This is particularly worrying at a time when Myanmar is experiencing a trend of accelerating impoverishment and deteriorating health standards, which are compounded by the growing inability of the social service structures to address the basic needs of the general population. Long-term stability anywhere depends in part on good governance, sound fiscal policies and wide consultations with the people on the decisions affecting their lives. The recent events also underline the need for Myanmar to improve its basic economic management capacity, particularly as the country strives to join in the broader region's economic development.

28. In this regard, the recommendation put to the Government to consider establishing a broad-based poverty alleviation commission to identify and address socio-economic needs would be a useful vehicle for promoting national dialogue on ways to improve the overall "health" of the country. The work of United Nations agencies in-country has been recognized as useful by the authorities, and every effort needs to be made to continue to find areas of mutual interest where progress can be made, including in the areas of health, education and drug reduction. While the humanitarian and political actions need to remain coordinated, it is essential not to let humanitarian actions become hostage to political conditions, and vice versa. Within the humanitarian sphere, the objective is to increase humanitarian access, while at the same time enhancing the understanding of humanitarian principles. This will require not less but more engagement from the humanitarian community. The Secretary-General believes that any serious steps on the political front should be acknowledged by the international community through the provision of incentives in the socio-economic area.

29. Ultimately, the responsibility for the future of Myanmar rests with the Government and people of Myanmar. The world, however, is watching closely to see how that responsibility will be exercised in the interest of all the people of Myanmar. No country today can afford to act in isolation from the standards by which all members of the international community are held, and what happens inside Myanmar can have serious international repercussions. A return to the status quo that existed prior to the crisis would therefore be unacceptable and unsustainable. The world needs a peaceful and prosperous Myanmar that can contribute to the development of the region and play a useful role in the international community. The Secretary-General is thus committed to making every effort, including through the intensification of his good offices, so that the United Nations can continue to work in partnership with Myanmar and support its efforts towards national reconciliation, the transition to democracy and full respect for human rights as the necessary foundations for long-term stability and prosperity.

30. Any sustained engagement by the United Nations will require the active support of the international community, including especially the countries in the region. The Secretary-General therefore welcomes the constructive role played by Myanmar's neighbours and by the members of ASEAN, and encourages such efforts to continue. The Secretary-General also welcomes the adoption of resolution S-5/1 on the situation of human rights in Myanmar by the Human Rights Council and of the Presidential statement by the Security Council on 11 October in support of his good offices mandate. The more united the international community is, the better the prospects for arriving at the shared goals of peace, democracy and prosperity for the people of Myanmar.